

What Is Claimed Is:

1. A method for teaching a skill to an individual comprising:

5 providing a virtual world comprising:

a virtual environment;

a plurality of virtual elements within said virtual environment, each of said virtual elements being capable of interacting with other of said virtual elements within the virtual environment; and

10 user controls for enabling an individual to interact with at least one of said virtual elements within said virtual environment;

wherein at least one of said virtual elements comprises a virtual character comprising a behavior state, an emotion state and a learning state, and wherein said behavior state, said emotion state and said learning state are capable of changing in response to (i) interaction with other virtual elements within the virtual environment, and/or (ii) commands from said user controls;

presenting a learning circumstance to the individual through the use of said virtual elements within said virtual environment;

prompting the individual to provide instructions to at least one of the virtual elements within said virtual environment, wherein the instructions being provided by the individual incorporate the skill to be taught to the individual, such that the individual learns the skill by providing instructions to the at least one virtual element; and

providing positive reinforcement to the individual when the instructions provided by the individual are correct.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein said instructions are provided to a virtual character.

3. A method according to claim 2 wherein the individual learns the skill by teaching that same skill to a virtual character.

4. A method according to claim 1 wherein said instructions comprise direct instructions.

5 5. A method according to claim 1 wherein said instructions comprise indirect instructions.

6. A method according to claim 5 wherein said indirect instructions comprise providing an example.

10 7. A method according to claim 5 wherein said indirect instructions comprise creating an inference.

15 8. A method according to claim 1 wherein said virtual environment is configured so that additional virtual elements can be introduced into said virtual environment.